



BRIEFING STATEMENT

BLM-MONTANA/DAKOTAS

MILES CITY FIELD OFFICE • 111 GARRYOWEN ROAD • MILES CITY, MONTANA 59301 • WWW.BLM.GOV/MT

August 11, 2011

SUBJECT: PUMPKIN CREEK RANCH AND RECREATION AREA

I. SUMMARY:

The Pumpkin Creek Ranch and Recreation Area (RRA) land exchange was finalized November 17, 2009. The exchange created a contiguous block of federal land covering approximately 20,556 acres, 15 miles south of Miles City, Mont. In total, the BLM acquired 14,037 acres and disposed of 15,572 acres, including 56 isolated parcels in Custer and Carter counties. The Pumpkin Creek Ranch and Recreation Area land exchange objective: "Provide the public with much needed hunting and recreational opportunities near Miles City, and provide the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) with increased habitat and range management opportunities."

II. BACKGROUND:

The Pumpkin Creek RRA is being managed under an interim management plan while the Miles City Field Office revises its resource management plan (RMP). Once final, the RMP will provide guidance for permitted/allocated activities and resource uses on the Pumpkin Creek RRA. Until that time, all activities or uses that require a BLM permit are not being approved. Approving a permitted use while the RMP process is underway could conflict or appear to conflict with the analysis in regards to future uses of the Pumpkin Creek RRA.

The Miles City Field Office requested input from the Eastern Montana Resource Advisory Council (RAC) and other collaborators for development of a preferred alternative for the RMP, which specifically includes the Pumpkin Creek Ranch and Recreation Area. Additionally, the RAC is being asked to explore opportunities in the development of a working group to assist drafting a comprehensive, multiple-use Pumpkin Creek Ranch and Recreation Area Management Plan. The creation of the working group would occur once the Draft RMP is available to the public.

Currently the Pumpkin Creek RRA Interim Management Plan provides for public recreational opportunities, motorized travel on existing two track roads/trails, and habitat maintenance such as stream restoration and wildfire suppression. Several activities and accomplishments have occurred since completion of the land exchange. The area was used to host the 2009 National Public Lands Day, Montana Youth Range Days, a Pheasants Forever meeting/tour, and several BLM/RAC group tours. The BLM's accomplishments include: installation of eight low-maintenance cattle guards; creation of four graveled parking areas with map boxes; boundary and interior interpretive signing; noxious weed control; numerous hours of hunter patrol, visitor contacts, and public education; riparian inventory on approximately four miles of stream; and around 1,660 acres of cultural inventory, including the recording of 14 new cultural resource sites.

More recent accomplishments include a Standards and Guidelines Assessment for Rangeland Health that occurred in June 2011. The BLM assessed both the riparian and upland health of the Pumpkin Creek RRA. Additionally, the BLM has incorporated Pumpkin Creek into its prairie stream fisheries and habitat inventory and monitoring network. The results of these assessments are currently being summarized. In 2011 the Miles City Field Office planned to plant several miles of Pumpkin Creek with cottonwood and willow cuttings and other root stock trees and shrubs (buffaloberry, currant, etc.); however, due to the severe weather and flooding, only about half of the plantings occurred. An intensive planting effort is planned for spring 2012 with assistance from the Montana Conservation Corps. Finally, because of the 2011 spring flooding and erosion, the Pumpkin Creek RRA was closed to vehicular traffic until conditions improved. The ranch has since re-opened, but several roads remain closed due to disrepair that poses a risk to public health and safety.

PUBLIC INTEREST:

Issues relating to access to public lands, recreation trends, agricultural needs, and commercial activities such as outfitting have placed emphasis on providing increased opportunities for the long-term public benefit. Management of the area for multiple-use objectives will benefit surrounding communities and visiting recreationists well into the future.

CONTACT:

Shane Findlay, Supervisory Land Use Specialist, (406) 233-3644